

Chapter 6

LDS Church Youth Activities Since the 1970s

The End of All-Church Tournaments

At June Conference 1971, YMMIA General Superintendent W. Jay Eldredge announced the “elimination of all-Church [*sic*] championship finals in all athletic events.” Eldredge justified the change, “We want to stress that the reasoning behind the new program, which is under the direction of the General Authorities, is we will have the opportunity to hold larger and more interesting events. We anticipate that the area tournaments will increase the activity of the youth and the participation of youth and adult in leadership roles.” He also explained that the large-scale dance festival would be replaced with regional events. However, dance, drama, and speech would continue to be a “sidelight” at June Conference. Eldredge encouraged local areas to plan programs that fit their needs.¹

This policy was restated with brief announcements in the *New Era*, the Church’s magazine for teenagers, and the *Ensign*, the Church’s adult magazine. The *New Era* article read:

“Young Men’s Athletic Program

1. No more all-Church tournaments. The Church, now worldwide, wants to emphasize sports on a local basis rather than have teams travel to Salt Lake City.
2. Athletic tournaments will be held on an area basis. . . .
3. The emphasis on zone or area sports will allow sports that are popular in different countries and areas to be played.”

“Dance

1. No more all-Church dance festivals. Instead, area or regional festivals may be held. This gives opportunity for more people to perform.”²

The *Ensign* article rationalized: “Because of the growth of the Church throughout the world, all-Church athletic tournaments will be replaced with area tournaments. Beginning with the 1971-72 MIA year (September 1, 1971 to August 31, 1972) nine areas in the United States and Canada will

conduct their own Church tournaments. All sports will be on ward, stake, regional, zone, and area levels with one exception: competition in senior basketball (Melchizedek and Aaronic Priesthood-adult) will be on a stake and regional basis and not extend to a zone or area level.” Changes also took place in music and dance festivals. “To permit increased participation at a local level, MIA music and dance festivals will in the future be held on a regional or area basis.” While these would continue during June Conference, “participants will be from [the Salt Lake City] area only.” Larger multiregional festivals could be held when priesthood and MIA leaders approved.³

What was the difference between the regional meets before and after this new policy? Church leaders and participants never viewed the regional meets in the all-church sports, basketball, softball, and volleyball, as the final goal. The regional tournaments were just one of the steps necessary to get to the all-church tournament. Of course, some teams never went to Salt Lake City; for them the regional meet was the final stop. But even for them, the ultimate goal was still all-church. After the change in policy, the regional meet was the final event. Church leaders instructed the regional sports directors to make the regional tournaments something that the players and their coaches would want to attend just as they had all-church tournaments.

Unlike sports, the dance festivals had not usually been competitive to attend. Dancers had always looked forward to the regional festivals as a final performance. The Salt Lake City experience was very large, and the participants enjoyed meeting and dancing with many people. While the regional meets were not as large, they could be as satisfying as the larger festival because the participants could dance with a group and meet new people. The shift from the all-church festival to the regional activities had an impact on those who wanted to go to Salt Lake City. However, the regional meets allowed more people be involved in dancing.

The Immediate Reasons for Ending All-Church

Church Growth

Why did these changes take place? As the *Ensign* article explained, a growing church was the number one concern that led to the change. A few numbers demonstrate this growth. During the 1960s, LDS Church leaders organized two hundred new stakes and nearly two thousand new wards. Only 20 percent of the new stakes were in Utah (a quarter of those at Brigham Young University); 60 percent were in the rest of the United States, and 20 percent were outside of the United States. This was a major change from 1900 when there were forty-three stakes and only two outside of the United States—one in Mexico and one in Canada, both in the Mormon colonies.⁴ Even the athletic program showed this change. In the 1950s there were seventeen divisions: eight were in Utah; three were outside the Intermountain West. By the time the program ended in 1971, there were thirty-nine zones throughout the world which were broken down into divisions and regions.⁵

Historians James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard explained that the change from all-church activities “was designed to stimulate greater local participation and minimize expenses and logistical problems involved in annual treks to Salt Lake City.”⁶ The few Charles Redd Center for Western Studies interviewees who discussed the end of the tournaments restated the Church’s position that growth was the major concern. With all the international growth, the Church was too large to have a tournament in Utah.⁷

Church growth led to other concerns. Some teams traveled long distances. The tournament was expensive for those who traveled and for the Church when so many out-of-town teams had to be housed and fed. Dale Christensen grew up in Idaho and took part in all-church basketball, softball, volleyball, and dance during the 1960s. He remembered when those programs ended, “We were a little surprised, a little disappointed. They told us that the Church was getting so big, they just couldn’t carry it on. It was expensive with people traveling. The reason we were told was there was

some liability in traveling. Maybe there were some accidents.”⁸

Another athlete, Thomas Bagley who grew up in the Salt Lake Valley, remembered participating in church basketball, softball, and volleyball. He enjoyed the games and especially appreciated working with his father, the ward’s coach. When asked about these programs, Bagley said he had “sort of bitter sweet feelings” about the tournaments ending. “Especially nowadays, there’s no way the Church could have one all encompassing tournament with the way the Church is spread out and the number of wards and stakes there are.” While he knew the program had started in the 1920s, “the glory days or the golden days were probably the 1950s or the 1960s when the TV came and put this championship game on television and it became a big deal.” While he recognized that the travel was extensive and the general costs overwhelming, he missed the fact that boys and men from throughout the Church could not meet through sports. “I can see both sides of it.”⁹

Worldwide Church Membership

Growth did not mean only travel and an expensive tournament. It also meant that people from throughout the world were Latter-day Saints. While Americans (including missionaries) had spread their sports throughout the world, other countries played games that were not part of the American tradition. Church leaders wanted to support physical activities and not just American sports. The 1971-72 *MIA Athletic Handbook* stated that the Mormon Church sponsored senior, M Men, and Explorer basketball; senior and Explorer softball; senior and Explorer volleyball; veteran, senior, and Explorer golf; and tennis. But YMMIA leaders stressed that those did not have to be the only options. While participation had always been emphasized, the choices of sports that the Church sponsored had been limited. Without all-church, the types of sports could be unlimited. The manual explained, “Participation is a prime objective of the Church priesthood athletic program. There are many who cannot compete in basketball, volleyball, softball. These, and many others, may be interested in less strenuous activity” that ward and stake leaders could determine. Some possibilities

included “archery, badminton, bicycling, bowling, cricket, croquet, fencing, gymnastics, handball, horseback riding, lacrosse, paddle ball, running, shuffleboard, skating, skiing, squash, swimming, table tennis, track, [and] wrestling.” Leaders often encouraged co-ed sports that had “man and wife” or “boy and girl” teams. While usually these sports would be on the ward or stake basis, general church leaders agreed that they could be expanded to include several wards if the stake president and stake YMMIA superintendent agreed.¹⁰

Church leaders stressed, “We should always remember and keep uppermost in mind that our greatest concern is the welfare of each individual participant in athletic events. The entire recreational and athletic program is a means to an end, and that end, of course, is to build Latter-day Saints strong in the faith and dedicated to the Church. Nevertheless, it is necessary to keep in mind that the athletic program is only a part of the great MIA institution. Athletics are an excellent drawing card and missionary tool in attracting young men to the Church and in reactivating many who have become inactive.”¹¹ With that in mind, the leaders explained, “The type of sports selected will vary throughout the Church and will be decided by local priesthood and YMMIA officers. Such sports will consist of athletic activity which fits the needs, interests, and cultures of the membership in that particular area. For example, sports selected for Europe or the Orient may be different than those selected for the US and Canada.”¹²

Abuses of the Program

While growth was probably the major impetus for the change, some players and coaches had not always followed the rules. For example, Edgehill Ward basketball player Allen Brown explained, “The excitement of being in the all-church tournament just created an abuse of the system.”¹³ Teams tried to “draft” players. The offer of a job to Larry Schlappi to move to California if he would live in a ward and play church ball was not unique. Dale Robinson recalled a similar team in southern California which recruited former BYU players to work in construction and play

on church teams.¹⁴

Daniel Burbank, who grew up in Weston, Idaho, also recalled abuses. First he explained a case where the team followed the rules. He told about some former high school players who put together an M Men team from Idaho that included two nonmembers, but they met the requirement to attend church meetings. His low point in church sports came when he lived in Hayward, California, and played a team from Alameda, California, at the all-church tournament. Burbank took the ball away from their superstar twice because he dribbled too high. The star was upset and “knocked me out cold.” Burbank was unhappy that the team went on to win all-church even though the Alameda manager said his players broke the Word of Wisdom. Burbank blamed poor officials and supervision for the problems, but he still felt, “It was a beautiful program if it had been conducted properly.”¹⁵

Scott Beal, a softball player from Merced, California, agreed. While ending the tournament was “a little bit of a let down,” there were concerns because “some of the people got too aggressive. They were into the win and not the association. If that’s the way they want to play the game, I’d rather see them not.” For him sports showed “those who boost morale and [those] who whine and moan.” For him winning was “secondary” but it had become primary to most who played church sports.¹⁶

Ron Record from southern California also believed a lack of sportsmanship was a reason for ending all-church tournaments. He complained about his own team as well as the opponents. His basketball team went to the all-church tournament the last year (1971), and the coach was very competitive. “He would get the biggest ringer [a good player who might be a non-Mormon or a Mormon recruited to live in the ward boundaries] he could find.” In the first game, Record’s team played Lincoln, Nebraska, and was winning by thirty or forty points, yet the coach still had the starters in. Record finally got into the game when someone from the audience yelled, “What about

those guys you haven't played?" The coach complied and emptied the bench. Record got in and made a basket. Then he started passing the ball so everyone had a chance to score. Looking back, Record recalled, "The Lincoln team stayed across from us in the hotel. They were nice people. I kind of felt bad about beating them so bad."¹⁷

After the first game, Record's team beat a team from Ogden, Utah, and then played the Logan Fifth and Eighteenth Ward. (The wards combined for basketball and other MIA activities because there were very few teenagers in the wards.) That Logan team had a player who was going to BYU. He was dating a woman from Record's ward, so they found out he was ineligible to play. Record recalled, "We blew the whistle on it as soon as we found." Since the Logan team lost one of its stars, they were "kind of mad obviously. They were playing pretty rough to put it mildly." One tried to take a ball from the best player on Record's team and "literally tackled him. . . . He knocked him to the ground and literally ground his face into the court." The referee called traveling. "Figure that one," Record commented. The player left the game and had stitches. He returned to the game but "one of the stitches was pulling his eye a little bit, so he couldn't see quite straight." Despite all the problems, Record's team lost by one point.¹⁸

There are always two sides to every story. Bruce Dickerson from Logan remembered the incident from another point of view. A BYU freshman football player came home twice a month so he could still play on the Logan Fifth and Eighteenth Ward team. Church leaders still declared the BYU student ineligible since he did not currently reside with his parents in the ward boundaries. So the Logan team played at the all-church tournament without the football player. The Logan team lost to West Jordan and their 6' 5" twins in the final game. Dickerson's team was unhappy and "made a stink about this whole thing. Our ward, our stake, our region, and everybody was going after the Church making a stink about it. " While "making a stink" did not change the outcome, according to Dickerson, church leaders may have not wanted to deal with such concerns. "I think

that's part of the reason they [the church leaders] gave up all-church. It got out of control." Dickerson added the negative impact of the decision. "This young man is not in the Church today because of that. He didn't go on a mission. He's not active, and he's not a member of the Church. It just ruined his whole attitude about the gospel. He couldn't separate the gospel and the Church because they wouldn't let him play."¹⁹

Changes with Officials

Those involved with the games complained about the rules and officials. But there were other concerns as well. Richard Ball who directed the all-church basketball tournament and officiated at the games said that a major problem occurred when the Church stopped paying officials. Ball recalled that the church games were a training program for beginning officials. Eventually the officials decided they did not receive enough pay and asked for a raise. Ball told them that if they asked for more money the Church would eliminate any pay—and that happened. As a result the officials that were willing to work for free as a church calling often lacked training. And if the players sensed the officials did not know the game, they played rougher.²⁰

Ray Hale, who grew up in Salt Lake City playing sports and then served on the softball and volleyball YMMIA committees, discussed the changes with the officials. As a professional official for college football and basketball, he continued to help after he left the committee. He recalled, "I heard some rumors" from one of the church committee members that the Church "didn't want to pay certified officials to referee the games. . . . I think the problem was they figured it was too much money." The committee members suggested training people in the wards to be officials. As a professional, Hale agreed to help and put on clinics for the volunteers. Still Hale complained, "it was hard to get the caliber of guys that were paid referees. It never seemed to click."²¹

Kenneth Erickson who also grew up in Salt Lake City played in all-church and became a professional volleyball official. He recalled the officials on the local level were paid, although the

fee was “very nominal.” He continued, “I don’t remember the years, but I was involved with that when we went to nonpaying referees.” The Church conducted clinics, and Erickson taught a four-hour Saturday clinic with demonstrations and a two-hour Tuesday clinic. He commented though that it was harder to referee church volleyball. The players did not know the rules and they were not as skilled as professionals.²²

The Larger Mormon Picture

But all-church tournaments did not end in a vacuum. The change came as church leaders changed their focus from auxiliaries to the priesthood in the 1970s. Similar to the correlation movement in the early twentieth century (discussed in chapter 2), General Authorities, under the direction of Elder Harold B. Lee, focused on priesthood direction. As Allen and Leonard explained, “Auxiliary organizations were in reality only helps to the priesthood in carrying out its proper function.”²³ Eliminating all-church programs was the first step. Further changes came when Church President Harold B. Lee released the 120 members of the YMMIA and YWMIA General Boards following June Conference in 1973. Lee announced the MIA would now be supervised by priesthood leaders, so there was no longer a need for the board. Board member Owen Rich felt “a good relief to be released from all the many responsibilities” but he also felt a sense of loss because he would no longer be involved in planning and he would miss the association with the board members.²⁴

Presiding Bishop Victor L. Brown explained the new program in the general priesthood session of general conference on April 7, 1973. He referred to the First Presidency’s announcement that created the Melchizedek Priesthood MIA and the Aaronic Priesthood MIA. Brown’s office would direct the church-wide MIA. On the local level, the bishopric would be in charge of the young men. Four adult women leaders, a president and an advisor for the Beehive, Mia Maid, and Laurel classes, directed the Young Women. A service and activity committee would plan service and

dance, drama, sports, and athletic programs for the ward, and a special effort would be made to include service activities. Teenagers would direct a local ward youth council. June Conference became a priesthood conference.²⁵

The reorganization was only the beginning of changes. In 1971 when YMMIA Superintendent W. Jay Eldredge announced the end of the “massive staged cultural events” at June Conference, he said there would still be a June conference.²⁶ But four years later that changed. At the 1975 June Conference, Church President Spencer W. Kimball announced that would be the last annual meeting. The Church planned to “decentralize” to “meet the increased challenges of a world wide organization” because of “the impracticality of concentrating our activities and learning processes in the headquarters center only.” A *New Era* article about the final conference concluded, “With determination to continue ‘lengthening our stride’ [a popular Kimball slogan], visitors and young people participating . . . left with recollections of emphasizing proud heritages, strong youth program, and a worldwide organization geared to take the gospel to all people.”²⁷ The focus was not just on the youth. The Primary, Sunday School, and Relief Society also eliminated their annual conferences after 1975. Two years later all cultural arts and athletic activities moved from the Young Men and Young Women programs to ward activity committees.²⁸

The same conference stressed the need for all members to be involved in physical fitness. Elder Marion D. Hanks, then an assistant to the Twelve, explained, “It is our purpose to continue to emphasize and strongly support competitive athletics on a ward, stake, region, and area basis throughout the Church.” But he emphasized that “athletic competition in the Church involves relatively few members.” With a belief “that we should do better,” he encouraged wards and branches to include “the entire ward family in wholesome activities.” Everyone could participate: children, singles, married, divorced, and widowed, “the active and the less active.” These programs “would recreate and regenerate” and “bring rich social and physical and spiritual benefits to those

involved.”²⁹

Regional Activities

The athletic and cultural focus moved from the all-church to regional tournaments. Catholic sociologist Thomas O’Dea expects this shift to take place in 1957. “The Mormon movement is on the eve of its Diaspora” where “belongingness would no longer be exclusively identified with a specific place.”³⁰ Mormon sociologist Armand L. Mauss reports on the church center in 1994. “Church members might think of Utah as the Rome or Mecca of their faith, but they do not identify with it as strongly as in earlier stages.” Instead members looked at their own temple or their hope for one and focused on the church in their area. As a result, “each cultural community could adapt and embroider the core in accordance with its own needs.”³¹

Regional activities reflected this change. Mel Jones, the director of church sports in the Southwest Area, remembered when church leaders decided to discontinue all-church, they told him, “Brother Jones, we want you to go back to Arizona and build a program that will make them forget Salt Lake City finals.” Jones set up regional programs, including a slow-pitch tournament in Prescott, Arizona. All the teams could play for five days, and people planned their vacations around the tournaments just as they had the all-church tournament.

Impact of Regional Church Sports

Ryan and Kacy Hastings, students in a BYU LDS sports and recreation class during fall semester 2005, reported major differences in the Merced-Fresno, California, area—once a hotbed for church softball—between all-church and regional play. First, fewer people participated. Second, the boys did not practice as much. Third, church leaders no longer announced their progress in priesthood meeting. Fourth, the quality of play went down, so many boys did not want to participate. Jordan Cutts, who grew up in Fresno during the 1990s said ward softball was “more like sand ball.” Wayne Hunter, who played softball before and after the all-church tournaments, said that teams from

Merced no longer came to Fresno to play. And the teams that remained did not have uniforms. Hunter stopped playing because softball became “just a fun thing” and not a way to learn leadership skills. With the change in participation, the Hastings’ second observation was a reduced level of competition. Slow pitch was not as competitive to many as fast pitch. More people could play with slow pitch, but those who really played to win stopped participating.³²

Despite these changes, softball still helped with conversions and reactivations to the Church. Doug Cutts, Kacy’s father, was an example. Doug’s wife Melynda was a member but Doug was not. The men in Melynda’s ward invited Doug to play church basketball and softball. He enjoyed softball and sometimes played four hours a week. He explained, “Softball played a big part in my conversion to the Church.” He made friends and wanted to be like them. He appreciated the noncompetitive games because he saw few major disagreements.³³

Stan Lambourne and his wife were inactive when they lived in San Francisco. When they moved to Fresno, Lambourne’s home teacher invited him to play church softball. He liked the relaxed games and made friends. As a result, he and his family attended church meetings. Lambourne then used church softball to bring more members back to the Church.³⁴

These examples would not be convincing to those who played softball in the Merced area during the 1960s. For Mark Hutchings, who grew up in the area, eliminating all-church tournaments meant “there was [not] nearly the emphasis on winning. I was quite disappointed because it had been such a big part of my life. I always liked the idea that we had a chance to go to all-church.” Not all former players agreed. Larry B. McGee felt, “The Church just matured out of [all-church]. Frankly people can get the same benefit probably from just going to a regional tournament or stake tournament.”³⁵

Local Decisions on Stake and Regional Play

Eventually the regional tournaments ended in some places. Mel Jones who had been so

involved in Arizona guessed why. He believed the program “diminished at the request of church leaders because there was so much emphasis on the sports program that it was detracting somewhat from family life and there was still a lot of recruiting going on to get big players in certain wards. Everything was considered, so finally the program was scaled back.” Jones said that this happened after he was released so he was not sure all of the reasoning. “I’m sure it was because the regional church leaders, the stake presidents and the region people determined to scale it back.”³⁶

The same thing happened in other places. Greg Davis took part in basketball stake competition in Washington state and then went to a regional or multi-regional tournament in the Tri-Cities area. “I think 1980 was the last year we were playing our bi-regional basketball tournament up in Cheney, Washington, just a little bit south of Spokane. It was quite a trip for us, quite an adventure.” The games provided a “good chance to be with friends and meet other members of the Church.” Despite competition and everyone wanting to win, “we never left whether we had won or lost feeling bad about a person on the other team or hating them because we would see them every year. They were the guys we grew up with whether they lived fifty miles away or a hundred miles away.”³⁷

General church leaders controlled all-church tournaments; it was a program administered from the top down. With the elimination of the all-church programs, local leaders supervised regional tournaments. As Mel Jones explained, these leaders decided whether they should have regional or even local activities. Eventually the tournaments ended in Arizona. Some stakes completely stopped playing softball there. The same thing happened in Washington state.

But not every area completely eliminated sports. Kenneth Erickson, who grew up playing sports in and out of the Church and who worked as a volleyball referee, was called to the Utah area committee in 1972 after all-church sports ended. He helped with tournaments for all sports and especially focused on assigning officials. Erickson was released after three years, but he continued

to help run the tournaments. He was also the volleyball specialist for the area, and he continued to do that in 2003. In that position, Erickson refereed and trained coaches and referees. He joked, “Maybe when I get it right, they’ll release me.”³⁸

Consolidated Meeting Schedule

A number of factors affected the change. One was when church leaders announced a consolidated meeting schedule in March 1980. Several stakes had experimented with a three-hour block of meetings on Sunday, and church leaders decided to implement it churchwide. So instead of the meetings spread out all day on Sunday and many weekend activities, most of the church programs took place on Sunday. Some things remained the same. Young men still did scouting and “usually” had a weekday activity. But the focus was to be on the priesthood. Young women could have weekday programs such as standard nights and teaching experiences. But “activities that are for entertainment only should be avoided.” Combined activities with young men and women were encouraged at least once a month but not more than twice a month. The focus was on family activities on a ward activity day. While sports were allowed, they were also to be during ward activity days “whenever possible.” The family and the ward became the focus. “Regional and area youth activities, which should be infrequent, are planned only at the invitation of the stake presidents.” They were also to be scheduled so they did not interrupt family time.³⁹ All of these instructions were left open so that wards and stakes could determine their own policies.

Adaption of the New Program

The focus, as Mel Jones expected, became more family oriented. But church leaders still encouraged sports and recreation. In 1979, before the new schedule, N. Eldon Tanner, who served in the Church’s First Presidency, talked about Mormonism as “a practical religion” that helped “people . . . find happiness and an inner peace” and “cope with problems and trials.” One way was through “wholesome recreation and activity,” including “camping, sports, drama, dance, music,

cultural arts, and physical fitness.”⁴⁰ In 1988, after eight years on the new consolidated schedule, Thomas S. Monson, a member of the First Presidency, elaborated, “Church sports activities have a unique central purpose much higher than the development of physical prowess, or even victory itself. It is to strengthen faith, build integrity, and develop in each participant the attributes of his maker.”⁴¹

The elimination of the YMMIA and the creation of the Young Men program also influenced programs. In 1982, Robert Backman, a member of the Seventy and Young Men president, encouraged athletics as a way to convert and bring inactive young men back to church. He emphasized, however, “That doesn’t mean unsupervised basketball on activity night.” But the sports could be “basketball, softball, volleyball, soccer, wrestling, boxing, cycling, swimming, tiddledywinks.” Those who did not play sports, who “march[ed] to the beat of a different drum,” could be involved in other activities. After telling a story about how drama affected a young man who became a university theater professor, Backman said that wards should not eliminate the “cultural arts,” even though there was not a churchwide program. He encouraged wards to focus on dance, drama, and speech.⁴²

The new program moved what had been Young Men and Young Women Mutual Improvement Association activities to ward activity committees. In 1983 Kathleen Lubeck explains the variety of programs in an *Ensign* article, “Activities That Change Lives.” She asks, “What has thousands of legs and is found in climes around the world jogging, clogging, Ping-Ponging, singing, acting, stomping, and serving others?” She responds, “Church members participating in Church-sponsored activities—a delightful alternative to undesirable activities often found outside the Church.” Her reasons for taking part in these programs were very similar to the ones that the recreation program started with. “These activities . . . provide a fun way to do missionary work, reactivate Church members, and develop self-esteem and talents at the same time.”⁴³

Then Lubeck tells of a family Ping-Pong tournament in Nagoya, Japan, an oral history project to document the conversion stories of members of the North Hollywood Third Ward, a play *Zion* presented in Rome, Italy, and a “Mormon Marathon” in Hawaii. She explains that the focus on family activities meant that “dance festivals and road shows . . . now sponsored by the activities committees . . . give families a great opportunity to work together.” The entire family could take part in a dramatic production or a dance. Families also took part in a Church Physical Fitness Awards Program. The success of these programs mirrored the all-church tournament days. According to Rulon Cummings, the chair of the Clearfield Utah Stake activities committee, “Last year alone, seven young men were baptized in the Church because of our stake sports program. . . . Eight sisters and seventeen brothers became active because of the mixed volleyball and softball programs.”⁴⁴

Optional Regional Tournaments

While regional tournaments were still possible, some areas completely eliminated them. But with more community and school sports, some wards had trouble convincing members to play church ball. For example, Mark Hutchings explained that in Provo, Utah, most boys played school sports. While his father wanted him to play church ball, Mark did not emphasize it for his sons and daughters.⁴⁵ Mel Jones also believed the focus shifted. While “in some stakes, they don’t hardly have any play,” he said, “they’re doing other things, so they’re keeping the youth entertained.” The youth played on city teams more than church teams.⁴⁶

Other wards, stakes, and regions had negative experiences, so church leaders decided to eliminate athletics. After explaining that church sports provided an opportunity for young people who did not play school sports, Boyd Jarman said that purpose disappeared. “I think the thing that killed [church sports] was the excessive emphasis on competition and winning.” As a result, Jarman explained, “I was part of a stake presidency that just said to the people in our stake, ‘This is not working, and we will not do it anymore.’ We just stopped sports activities for the men.” He agreed

with the interviewer that it was a “controversial move” and there was “opposition.” But he justified the decision: “At one of the last games there were two elders’ quorum presidents on the floor wrestling over a call. What do you accomplish? There’s a time for things, and there’s a time to end things.”⁴⁷

Those who continued to play sports often did so on only a local level and focused on spirituality. During the 1980s tempers flared at a basketball game in Sparks, Nevada. Consequently, stake leaders decided to examine church sports more closely. By giving teams priesthood names (Sparks Fifth Deacons), starting and ending games with prayer, reminding participants that the cultural hall was in a dedicated place of worship, insisting that eligibility included church attendance requirements, and occasionally changing the makeup of the teams and eliminating scores, the stake hoped to encourage sports. They wanted to do as Brigham Young suggested, “Get to Zion, but . . . [not] drag Babylon along with us.”⁴⁸

Several factors led to the end of stake and regional sports in the Provo South Stake. First, cost was a consideration. Very few wards and stakes had softball fields, so the stakes had to rent community facilities. The cost became more than the local church leaders in the Provo South Stake wanted to pay. Even if they could have covered the cost, there was the additional problem of finding time to use the fields when so many business and city leagues also played.

Second, time was a problem in church-owned facilities. The Church moved from each ward having its own building to usually three wards sharing the space. On weekday evenings and Saturdays, youth and adult groups tried to schedule the building. On the one night designated for stake sports, the men and women often disagreed who should use the gymnasium. When other groups scheduled the building, sometimes the athletes immediately moved on to the floor as those attending a meeting attempted to clean up. Some players even felt that they should use the gym all night.

Third, lack of interest was another concern. As men and women became involved in many activities, few had time to take part in church sports. The Charles Redd Center interviewees tell stories about how their lives revolved around church sports. They would never dream of missing a game. But in a rushed world full of meetings and all types of recreational activities, often not enough players showed up for a game.

Fourth, there were major problems with sportsmanship. Some church leaders were encouraged *not* to play church sports because they became too emotional and physical during the games. These increased problems reached a climax when some players disagreed with a call during a women's regional volleyball game. The players questioned the call; the fans got involved. Some of the fans even followed players from the opponent's team home. After this final event, the stake president announced that the wards under his control would no longer participate in region sports.⁴⁹

Why was there such poor sportsmanship? From a strictly athletic view, being good sports was no longer the emphasis. Examples from my experience as a fan show some of the change. When I was in high school, fans sat quietly when their team or the opposing team shot field throws; the gym was so quiet it was almost eerie. But that sense of showing respect for the other team disappeared over the years. In professional basketball, fans started waving tubes to disturb the player who was shooting. Basketball players were required to raise their hand when they fouled and were given technical fouls if they complained too much. Complaining and not accepting a foul became common practice first in the National Basketball Association and then in college and community sports. These "bad boys" of basketball were heroes, and young players often followed the bad examples.

These examples occurred in the 1980s. My BYU students in 2007 shared some of their experiences in the 1990s and early 2000s. When I asked them for comments about their church sports experiences, I got very mixed reactions. Some loved the experience. Students in my LDS

sports and recreation class even chose to write their finals in the form of letters to the General Authorities about why they should bring back an all-church tournament. The major argument was the need for a sense of community among Mormon boys. Students in my American Studies class told of their experiences that represented the best and the worst of church ball. Several examples show the variety of experiences.

Liesl Christensen, who grew up in the Olympic Fifth Ward in Salt Lake City, loved church sports. They referred to their team as “Team Spandex,” since everyone wore spandex shorts under their regular shorts—“the brighter the better.” Girls who did not often come to church came to play sports and became friends with those who attended meetings regularly. The team was good; it won the regional tournaments several times. But the main goal was to have “a bunch of fun.” No one got really upset if “somebody messed up.” Instead “we just laughed and kept on playing. It was a perfect place for girls to come and be hyper and have fun.” Christensen concluded, “I loved [playing church sports] and would do it again if I had the chance.”⁵⁰

Jake Davis, who grew up in the Alpine Stake in northern Utah County, also enjoyed his sporting experiences, especially “multi-ward basketball tournaments.” While the stake sponsored baseball and flag football, they were more like pickup games. For the basketball tournaments, “there was a clear organization and system in place with clear scheduling and officiating.” He also liked it because his ward did well. “Pardon the ego for a second, but my ward was always in competition for the title. We won the tournament twice and took second once.”⁵¹

Not all the students’ experiences were positive though. John Brumbaugh, who grew up in Libby, Montana, enjoyed playing basketball with his friends. They traveled to Bonners Ferry, Idaho, for a one-day tournament, and since the team had played together “winning the tournament was not much of a challenge.” Brumbaugh sometimes was concerned about the lack of sportsmanship by players and fans. “Physically it got out of hand a couple of times,” Brumbaugh said. He told of a

time when an opponent tackled his nonmember friend Tim. “I can still remember Tim’s body parallel to the gym floor and his wrinkled forehead as he pulled his body off the ground. Church basketball is a tough sport.”

Brumbaugh remembered a stake tournament game where he and the opposing guard “were going at it throughout the game.” In the second half, Brumbaugh’s father “got mad at the other guard and started yelling at him every time he got the ball.” There were only twenty people in the gym so everyone heard his dad yelling “hot dog” and “show boat” at the guard. Brumbaugh continued, “I finally had to do something when my dad yelled at me, ‘John, you can take him. He does not have anything.’ I stopped playing and turned to my dad and told him, ‘Shut up! We are trying to play a game.’” Brumbaugh recalled, “After the game the hour drive back home was in deathly silence.”⁵²

Sara Manning played high school basketball so she did not play with her Young Women until she quit the school team her senior year. That year the church team made it to the second round in a tournament but only because Manning scored most of the points. She summarized, “So my experience with church sports was kind of bad. I would have rather played with people who knew how to play well.” But mainly she tired of playing in basketball after participating for so many years.⁵³

Cynthia Clark, a middle-age returning student, explained that her only experience with church sports was watching her five sons play. She asked them to send me their comments. They matched Brumbaugh’s and Manning’s experiences. Clark’s son Andrew wrote, “When it is organized and the elders are matched up against another team in the stake it tends to bring the worse out in people.” Rather than creating “brotherhood,” the game created “competitive juices . . . in the form of pushing, taunting, arguing calls, and coming back on lesser teammates.” Her son Steve called church ball “the best of times, the worst of times.” Although the game started with a prayer, it was “the most insignificant, unholy, over recited insincere, full of B.S. prayer.” The player

“mumbles something about good sportsmanship, no harm or accident” while the players eye each other and decide how they will hit the other players or complain if they don’t get playing time. He recalled a time when a bishop was asked to leave a game because of his constant complaints. In response, he walked on to the floor, said “That’s my ball,” took it and left. The game ended for lack of a ball.⁵⁴

So depending on where Mormons lived, church sports continued to be important or were discontinued because of problems. There was no longer an all-church program so individual wards, stakes, and regions could make their own decisions. While there was not a program for everyone, there were attempts to include sports and recreation on a one-time basis.

Does that mean that Mormons stopped playing sports? By all means, no. Teenage boys and adult men still gather in their local meeting houses and play pickup games. One student argued that the intramural program at Brigham Young University served the same purpose as church tournaments to bring college students together to share experiences and relieve tension. When Ricks College, a church-owned junior college in Rexburg, Idaho, became a four-year university, church leaders eliminated competitive sports on the junior college level. Rather than moving Brigham Young University-Idaho into university-status sports, the leaders expanded university-wide sports and cultural activities and encouraged all students to take part.

Another program which helped young people come together was an Especially for Youth (EFY) program where teenagers gather to share cultural and testimony-building experiences. Similar to the Spectacular program sponsored by the Community of Christ (see chapter 1), the EFY program is an opportunity for Latter-day Saint youth to meet and mingle. The goal is to help those who participate “come unto Christ.”⁵⁵

The first Especially for Youth was held at Brigham Young University in 1976 when one hundred seventy-two youth and fifteen counselors met. One year later over eight hundred teenagers

took part. In 2006 the first meetings were held outside of North America in England and Germany. Since 1982 the conference has had a yearly theme. The program is set for all EFY and includes dances, workshops, parties, variety shows, and testimony meetings. Participants pay a fee for the continuing education program. While the organization is very different, the EFY activities provide a chance for Mormon teenagers to gather together and meet people from throughout the church just as the all-church athletic tournaments and dance festivals did until 1971. Just as BYU intramurals provide a place for students who play sports, EFY allows youth to see they are not alone.

Ad Hoc Programs

Other examples of one-time activities were regional conferences in the 1970s. With the growth of the Church, General Authorities recognized that they needed to go to meet church members since most could no longer attend general conference or participate in all-church programs. Leaders planned regional conferences where selected General Authorities traveled to an area and all the local stakes attended. These one-time conferences included more than just worship services. There were always cultural events and occasionally sports.

Cultural Events

In 1975 during the last June Conference, church leaders sponsored a “lavish Heritage Arts Festival that encouraged [participants] to ‘remember the past to better the future.’” This festival “was intended to stimulate similar activities to be held in stakes and regions throughout the Church this year and next.” The project was very large with “displays, dramatizations, films, historic tours, concerts, and musicals spread throughout the city.” The festival even included a musical “Title of Liberty,” which American wards could use for the Bicentennial of the United States’ Independence.⁵⁶ While there was not a focus on Heritage Arts Festivals after 1976, some regions continued to have productions. For example, in 1985, thirteen thousand church members performed before a crowd of one hundred thousand in a southern California dance festival.⁵⁷

Area Conference Cultural Events

Church President Joseph Fielding Smith held the first area conference in England in 1971. It included a cultural evening. “Long skirted ladies and men in black filled the ballroom of the Cumberland Suite at Belle Vue. A 13-piece orchestra played the quiet danceable tunes along with an occasional ‘March of the Mod,’ which results in a happy, highly active group dancing.” A floorshow included “a program that was highly representative of Britain and its cultures.” A drama “House Talk” “had a special British flavor and was received with emotion and interest.”⁵⁸

In 1972, Church President Harold B. Lee presided over a conference in Mexico City. According to the *Ensign*, “The conference began Friday evening. The glory of the Mexican people was shown in two hours of song and dance as 764 performers presented a breathtaking performance before some 15,000 warmly receptive Saints.” The presentation included Aztec dances and folk songs from throughout Mexico. A twenty-one-year-old dance director, Jose Layte traveled over two thousand miles in the Veracruz area to teach dances. The Saturday before the performance they practiced for ten hours. A one-hundred-fifty-member choir from the Mexico Southeast Mission practiced twice a week in their branches and then at three all-day practices.⁵⁹

In 1973 a German area conference included cultural and sports activities. On Friday afternoon youth participated in volleyball and table tennis competitions. For the evening production the area authorities divided the invited European countries into regions and gave each ten minutes. The youth were excited to participate and gave the conference a name OCOS—One Church, One Spirit.⁶⁰

Spencer W. Kimball attended a Scandinavian Area Conference in Stockholm, Sweden in 1974. The *Ensign* declared, “The Friday cultural event—Festspel—served as a vehicle for giving a remarkable thrust to the conference and a seal of unity for the Saints of the four lands.” Each country had fifteen minutes to give a program “reflecting its cultural heritage.” The representatives from

Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland entered the stadium with flags. They sang all the countries' national anthems. For the finale everyone sang "Landkjenning" ("Discovery") in Norwegian. The Danes, Swedes, and Finns "struggled and practiced to learn a song in a tongue not native to them. But when they gathered together Friday evening, it was as if they had sung all their lives together." Ramm Arvesether, the seventy-three-year-old conductor, was thrilled that the song brought groups often divided together. He declared, "It was a special good feeling for me to lead the chorus, to lead the symbol of unity that we needed to have."⁶¹

In 1975 Kimball attended area conferences in Sao Paulo, Brazil and Buenos Aires, Argentina. The *Ensign* reported, "The format for both conferences was the same. On Friday evening the members presented a program of songs and dances that depicted local cultures." These programs helped the youth meet other members at rehearsals. "As a result there were some deep friendships that developed, and there were even some engagements." The actual performances "did much to stimulate a feeling of unity among members who came from regions and countries hundreds of miles apart. Each group seemed to gain more appreciation for the others' unique talents and cultural heritage." Television stations in Brazil reported the event, and the crews asked, "Where have you been keeping these choirs?" The *Ensign* article continued, "Of course, the answer was that the choirs . . . had not existed until the people arrived in Sao Paulo."⁶²

Other activities also included performances. At the Expo '74 fair in Spokane, Washington two thousand dancers, singers, and performers from twenty-one stakes performed. They traveled long distances to practice and perform, but in the end they declared it was all worth it. A highlight was church president Kimball speaking at a special devotional for the participants. In addition, the group met new people and learned new missionary techniques.⁶³

Initially area conferences were not held in the United States and Canada. Church leaders saw them as a way to reach out to Latter-day Saints who were far from church headquarters. In May

1978 Church President Spencer W. Kimball outlined plans for North America meetings as well as a regional representative seminar. Kimball explained, “We meet together often in the Church in conferences to worship the Lord, to feast upon the word of Christ, and to be built up in faith. . . . In recent years some of the most inspirational conferences have been the area conferences held outside the United States. We plan, beginning in 1979, to hold some area conferences in the United States. Through these area conferences more members of the Church will be able to meet and hear the General Authorities.”⁶⁴ Of the ten area conferences held during the last half of 1979, five were in the United States and one was in Canada.⁶⁵

The international area conferences included cultural programs with local songs and dances. These were followed by worship meetings for mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, and the general membership. The reports of the Houston conference in June 1979 and the Los Angeles conference in May 1980 included excerpts from the General Authorities’ talk but did not mention a cultural program. The area conferences in North America were similar to General Conference and focused on talks and not performances.⁶⁶

In 1975 President Kimball called these conferences “a great new adventure in taking the whole program of the Church out to the people of the whole world.” The concept was good, but it came at the time when church leaders were simplifying and cutting back on the meetings they attended. At the same time that Kimball announced plans for area conferences in North America, he explained that stake conferences would be held only twice a year instead of quarterly and General Authorities would only attend one conference. As part of that program, the church leaders replaced the area conferences with “smaller-scale regional [multistake] conferences.” According to historians James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, “Many who attended [the area conferences] had saved for months, sometimes at great personal sacrifice, to share the spiritual richness of the occasion.” Eliminating area conferences also saved time and money for these members.⁶⁷

Return to the Past

Although all-church activities ended, sports and recreation programs never completely disappeared in the Church. Wards and stakes were free to adapt programs that fit their needs. Programs similar to those that the 1983 *Ensign* article explained were held throughout the world. However, they were not as organized or as frequent as they had been in the past. In 2004 that changed. The First Presidency sent a letter to all local leaders asking for stake and multistake functions of “music, dance, drama, speech, sports, [and] visual arts.” The leaders explained that these would create “a sense of unity and opportunities to develop friendships, especially among the youth.”⁶⁸

To show how this could be done, the First Presidency asked people to work together and develop programs in connection with temple dedications. On January 10, 2004, for example, two thousand young people in African costumes performed at the Accra Ghana Temple dedication. The next month six hundred church members portrayed Alaska’s native culture at the Anchorage Temple rededication. The same month eight thousand local members and twelve hundred missionaries performed in the rain for audiences of sixty thousand in Sao Paulo. The youth performances associated with temple dedications continued that year in Denmark and New York City.⁶⁹

In 2005 “Day of Rejoicing” was the cultural event for the Aba, Nigeria Temple. Sister Diane Clements, a Church Educational System missionary, explained, “It’s a chance for the youth to get together and have fun. For the Nigerian youth, it’s been a wonderful opportunity to revise these traditional dance customs.”⁷⁰ A cultural event at the Newport Beach, California Temple had the same affect. The youth performed “A Sacred Place” in a large Orange County arena. Joseph I. Bentley, chair of the Temple Youth Celebration Committee, explained that the event inspired the youth to work toward attending the temple later in life. The practices started in May for the September event. The six hundred participants donated one hundred thousand hours.⁷¹

The year 2005 was also another anniversary in the LDS Church. Members celebrated the two hundredth anniversary of Joseph Smith's birth, and church leaders asked youth to prepare programs to remember Smith's life. Wards held cultural nights. Selected participants appeared at a stake presentation. Some of these went to regional activities. The *Church News* reported events in Utah during July and August

- 58,000 attended two pageants at the Dee Events Center at Weber State University.
- 11,000 in Cedar City participated in a program including displays of art.
- 42,000 youth from the Salt Lake area participated on a local level. Many attended the "Day of Celebration" at the Rice Eccles Stadium at the University of Utah. Ten thousand sang in a choir. Church President Gordon B. Hinckley attended and declared, "What a show."
- 25,000 attended in Logan at the Utah State University Romney Stadium.
- 55,000 people attended three performances of "A Generation of Promise: Remembering the Prophet Joseph Smith" in the Marriott Center at Brigham Young University and saw a performance of music and dance.⁷²

The festivals also took place elsewhere. On July 23, fourteen stakes in the Vancouver, Washington, area performed "O Come Ye Nations of the Earth." The dance festival included eight hundred youth dancers, one hundred Primary children, and the BYU Ballroom Dance Team. Nearly eight thousand people attended the afternoon and evening performances in the McKenzie Stadium. Two local newspapers reported the event.⁷³

R. Christine Ollerton, a BYU dance instructor, grew up in an inactive Mormon home. Similar cultural activities helped her become an active member. She was disappointed when the cultural activities disappeared, but she felt they were coming back because of church president Gordon B. Hinckley. "I think he and the others realized something is missing. We've got to fill these young people's lives with the arts and with wonderful things to create and do. It also helps them to build

self esteem, to feel of worth.”⁷⁴

Of course, sports and cultural activities never completely disappeared in the LDS Church. For example, in 2003, Bob Armstrong, the stake physical activity director in the Modesto, California, North Stake, described the MBA (Mormon Basketball Association) in that area. The motto for the association was “You Make the Difference! Have Fun, Play Hard, Bring a Friend and Remember Sportsmanship—Always!” Nearly three hundred men and two hundred-fifty young men participated each year. Fans who attended the games ranged in age from fifteen to one hundred, with the young men drawing the largest crowds with parents and friends. But many enjoyed watching bishops and other ward leaders play. Armstrong estimated they had three to eight baptisms a year from sports. In the Hayward Stake where Armstrong lived, three of five bishops and the stake president had all joined the Church because of sports.⁷⁵

After 2004 local leaders developed more youth activities. Wards and stakes in Orem, Utah, planned dance and speech festivals. Youth choirs are especially important in one stake, and nearly all the teenagers participate. While the Provo South Stake stopped participating in regional sports in the 1980s, in 2007 the region reintroduced a regional volleyball tournament. In November 2007, the Provo South Stake scheduled open court volleyball play. The announcement offered skills and rules instructions and encouraged all teenagers and adult women to participate. Participants in the stake play could take part in a regional tournament that was held between December 1 and 8, 2007.

This tournament was part of a larger program that started in the Utah South Area in 2004. According to Kathleen Carlile, the Utah South Area Women’s Sports Director, that year Merrill C. Bateman, a General Authority assigned to supervise the area from Alpine, Utah to St. George, Utah, asked that the stakes and regions initiate a sports program for teenagers and adults. Carlile continued, “Since that time, we have been working on developing the program following the priesthood direction given.” She continued that like “all auxiliaries and programs in the church [the

sports program] focus[es] on the mission of the church in bringing souls to Christ.”⁷⁶

Barbara Shurtleff, the regional sports director in Orem, Utah, worked under the direction of Carlile. She explained how the program worked in Orem. While there were eleven stakes in her region, only four had women’s teams and only two played in the tournament. Shurtleff explained, “We have some stakes that do not have much participation because of past experiences.” However, she saw changes, “I have seen my own bishop slowly become more accepting over the last few years.” Shurtleff was grateful for area support. “We have been learning and growing with the help of our area leaders.” Each game started with a devotional and prayer. Shurtleff stressed sportsmanship with the players, coaches, and fans even though a fan who was out of control called Shurtleff “the Gestapo.”⁷⁷

All of these programs were part of the Utah Area Sports who maintained a webpage and sponsored seven sport: basketball, dodgeball, flag football, futsal (a game similar to soccer that could be played indoor on a basketball court or a small field outside), golf, softball, and volleyball. The webpage included guidelines, rules, and purposes for sports. It stressed, “Church activities should strengthen testimonies and foster personal growth. They also should provide opportunities to apply gospel principles and help participants develop friendships in a wholesome environment.” The sports program was to help bring people together for the same reasons that it did in the past.⁷⁸

Ron Gerber supervised the Utah Area Sports. As with the all-church tournaments, his programs emphasized spiritual aspects. He used a quote from President Ezra Taft Benson, “Sportsmanship is first tried in sports. The athletic program is a spiritual program. If it weren’t, we wouldn’t continue it. We’re interested in being about men and women of character and integrity.” To emphasis that, Gerber had the Young Men, Young Women, Relief Society, and Priesthood groups recite their theme and start with a prayer. He provided posters that had a picture of Christ and the organizational themes. According to Gerber, “It’s made a difference. We don’t have as much

craziness as we once had.” Gerber also worked to teach basketball rules to coaches, players, and officials.⁷⁹

Gerber agreed sports were not emphasized as much after the 1970s. For example, teams were not recognized in sacrament meeting. Still, in the Northern Utah area more than two thousand wards participated in thirty-six tournaments in 2004. More tournaments meant more teams participated. Some leaders were very supportive. A stake president from Tremonton, Utah, handed out the award if a team from his stake won. He talked to stake members on how sports can be used to “fellowship and activate” families.⁸⁰

Gerber also explained the tournament no longer gave sportsmanship awards because they did not want to reward people for doing what they should do and because they were not sure how to select the winner. In 1950, Gerber was on a team at the all-church tournament that won second place for sportsmanship in 1950, but he is not sure they were the best sports. Maybe it was a second place award.⁸¹ So even after all-church programs changed in 1971, Gerber and others saw reasons for continuing sports and recreation in the LDS Church.

Summary

While cultural events continue on an ad hoc basis (usually at temple dedications), large-scale sports that involve the entire church do not happen. Mormon men and boys still continue to play basketball, but with little supervision it often is a brawl with a prayer. There are several reasons. The Church might not stress sports as much because the competition might not produce the reverence that General Authorities want to create. In 1977, Church leaders recommended that wards take the trophy cases out of the foyers because they took away from the quiet space the leaders wanted in the meeting house area.⁸²

Another reason is there has been a shift in focus from the cultural to the spiritual in the Mormon Church. Sociologist Armand L. Mauss refers to this change in his book *The Angel and the*

Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation. Mauss starts out by describing the conflict between two symbols in downtown Salt Lake City, the Angel Moroni on the temple and the beehive on the Joseph Smith Memorial Building (formerly the Hotel Utah). For Mauss, the angel represents the spiritual and the beehive the more secular cultural elements of Mormonism. For years Mormons focused on the beehive and assimilating into the American culture. However, Mauss saw a shift more toward the angel and less concern with the beehive about the same time that the all-church activities ended.⁸³

According to Thomas F. O’Dea, the Church was moving in that direction in 1957. He writes that to survive, the LDS Church and other religions should deal with “deeper human problems” such as “understanding . . . the problem of God and man.” He sees Mormonism moving in that direction in the 1950s but adds, “Only in the field of recreation has Mormonism been able to meet the challenge” of dealing with “worldly spheres.” Even recreation might need to be eliminated because government and secular groups could promote it better than religion.⁸⁴

Armand L. Mauss sees these changes taking place. He discusses how the Church moved from its “extensive education programs” including the MIA youth activities to a focus on the spiritual elements. As Mauss writes, “Gone are the . . . competitions provided by the old MIA.” In their place were “priesthood correlation and youth temple trips.” Mauss sees these changes as positive. “This spiritual core would link Mormon communities around the world into one universal religion.” He continues, “If the Mormon Church is to become truly a new world religion in the 21st century, as some scholars have projected, the angel will have to be largely disengaged from the American beehive” so that the Church can create new cultural beehives in other places.⁸⁵

Still, members of the Church view life as a complete adventure. Taking part in sports and recreation activities has been an important way to put the gospel into practice. The all-church tournaments and June Conference provide a valuable window into some activities that the Church

provided for teenagers during two-thirds of the twentieth century. Athletic and cultural events were never part of worship, but they were important activities that brought church members and others in connection with each other and helped develop a sense of community. Whether they played team sports like basketball, softball, and volleyball, participated in individual sports like tennis and golf, or danced, young Latter-day Saints in the twentieth century learned how to live the gospel by playing. Their recreation was not their spiritual life, but their experiences were “spiritualized recreation.”

1. *Church News*, June 26, 1971, 11; *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 27, 1971, B1.
2. “News of the Church,” “Big Changes in MIA Programs,” *New Era* (September 1971):44.
3. “Programs and Policies Newsletter,” *Ensign* (September 1971):76.
4. L. Tom Perry, “He Has Given a Law for All Things,” *BYU Devotional*, November 29, 1977, <http://byubroad.org>; Church News Staff, *Deseret News 1974 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1974), 169-174, 205.
5. YMMIA Athletic Committee Files, 1942-1971, Church History Library, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. (Hereinafter referred to as Church History Library.), used by permission.
6. James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 600-01.
7. A survey of more than one hundred interviews showed that only ten talked about why they felt all-church tournaments were discontinued. In many cases, the question was not asked.
8. Dale Christensen Oral History, interviewed by Michael Cannon, 2003, Orem, Utah, 8, LDS Sports and Recreation Oral History Project, Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. (Unless otherwise cited, all oral histories come from this collection.).
9. Thomas Bagley Oral History, interviewed by Michael Cannon, 2003, Salt Lake City, Utah, 8-9.
10. *YMMIA Athletic Handbook, 1971-72* Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1971), 17. (Hereinafter referred to as *YMMIA Athletic Handbook* with the year.)
11. *Ibid.*, 3.
12. *YMMIA Athletic Handbook, 1972-73*, 4. This statement was also in the 1969-70 and 1971-72 handbooks.
13. Allen Brown Oral History, interviewed by Ben Sandel, 2003, Salt Lake City, Utah, 5.
14. Dale Robinson Oral History, interviewed by Jenny Harris, 2003, Alpine, Utah, 2.
15. Daniel Burbank Oral History, interviewed by Gary Huntington, 2003, Taylorsville, Utah, 1-3.

16. Scott Beal Oral History, interviewed by Erin Hutchings, 2003, Lehi, Utah, 7.
17. Ron Record Oral History, interviewed by Jenny Harris, 2004, Telephone Interview, 8-9.
18. Ibid.
19. Bruce Dickerson Oral History, interviewed by Gary Huntington, 2003, Orem, Utah, 3.
20. Richard Ball Oral History, Interviewed by Jenny Harris, 2003, Salt Lake City, 3.
21. Ray Hale Oral History, interviewed by Gary Huntington, 2003, Salt Lake City, Utah, 8.
22. Kenneth Erickson Oral History, interviewed by Michael Cannon, 2003, Salt Lake City, Utah, 4.
23. Allen and Leonard, 600.
24. Owen Rich Personal History, copy of pages in possession of Jessie Embry.
25. Victor L. Brown, "The Aaronic Priesthood MIA," *Ensign* (July 1973), 80; Allen and Leonard, 600.
26. *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 27, 1971, B1.
27. "June Conference, 1975–The End of an Era," *New Era*(October 1975):16.
28. Allen and Leonard, 654.
29. "News of the Church," *Ensign* (September 1974):89-96.
30. Thomas F. O’Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 262-263.
31. Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 13, 209.
32. Ryan and Kacy Hastings, "Post All-Church Tournament Softball in Fresno," term paper in possession of Jessie Embry.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.

35. Hutchings Oral History, 21; Larry B. McGee Oral History, interviewed by Jenny Harris, 2003, 9.
36. Mel Jones Oral History, interviewed by Michael Cannon, 2003, Mesa, Arizona, 3-4.
37. Greg Davis Oral History, interviewed by Gary Huntington, 2003, 2-3.
38. Kenneth Erickson Oral History, interviewed by Michael Cannon, 2003, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2.
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43. Kathleen Ludbeck, "Activities That Change Lives," *Ensign* (August 1983):12.
44. Ibid.
45. Hutchings, 21.
46. Jones, 5.
47. Boyd Jarman Oral History, interviewed by Benjamin Sandel, 2003, 8.
48. Stratton, 58.
49. This information comes from my memory of the events and conversations with Shirley Olsen, A. LeGrand Richards, and Cindy Richards.
50. Liesl Christensen email, in Jessie Embry's possession.
51. Jake Davis email, in Jessie Embry's possession.
52. John Brumbaugh email, in Jessie Embry's possession.
53. Sara Manning email, in Jessie Embry's possession.

54. Cynthia Clark email; Andrew Clark; Steve Clark email; in Jessie Embry's possession.
55. <http://ce.byu.edu/yp/efy-programs/efy/index.cfm>; retrieved January 24, 2008.
56. "June Conference 1975--The End of a Era," *New Era* (October 1975):16.
57. Larene Porter Gaunt, "Celebrate!," *Ensign* (April 2005):43-44.
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60. "The Munich Area General Conference," *Ensign* (August 1973):40.
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68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., 40-41.
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71. Ibid., September 3, 2005, 8-9.
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73. Ibid., August 20, 2005, 10.
74. R. Christine Ollerton Oral History, interviewed by Lisa Christensen Gee, 2005, 6.
75. Bob Armstrong, email, December 29, 2003.
76. Kathleen Carlile email, in Jessie Embry's possession.
77. Barbara Shurtleff email, in Jessie Embry's possession.
78. <http://www.utahareasports.org>, retrieved on December 7, 2007.
79. Ron Gerber Oral History, interviewed by Jenny Harris, 2003, 2.
80. Ibid., 15, 18.
81. Ibid., 1, 16.
82. See "Reverence in the Church: A New Long-Range Emphasis," *Ensign* (February 1977):11-13. This article was based on a reverence pamphlet that leaders sent throughout the Church and is similar to the ideas President Spencer W. Kimball suggested in a *Church News* article, September 18, 1976, 8-9, 15. One of the ways to promote reverence, according to the *Ensign* article, was to eliminate trophy cases which often held the all-church trophies.
83. Mauss.
84. O'Dea, 262-263.
85. Mauss, 26, 155-156, 198, 202, 207, 207, 212.